

and also sometimes too modern, having shot right through Christianity into secular humanist criminality. His suggested therapy is increased moral education and acknowledgment of Melanesia's pervasive payback logic—that “most of the problems and most of the best answers to them revolve around ethics and moral choices” (458). Trompf is a Tocqueville in Melanesia, but his criticism of payback may be less compelling, in future readings, than that earlier pundit's anxious appreciation of democracy.

LAMONT LINDSTROM
University of Tulsa

* * *

Tradition and Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society, by Ben Burt. Studies in Anthropology and History, volume 10. New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994. ISBN 3-7186-5449-0, xii + 299 pages, maps, figures, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. US\$58.

Despite a current profusion of theoretically sophisticated and empirically rich ethnographies, the field of Melanesian anthropology still gives scant attention to the now all-pervasive role of Christianity in most corners of the region. This well-written book on the Kwara'ae of Malaita by British anthropologist Ben Burt is a most welcome and engrossing exercise in just the opposite direction, taking issues of Christianity in the context of Kwara'ae “tradition” as its main substantial focus and analytical challenge. The book is a joy to read; the text is clear,

uncluttered, and easily accessible to a wide audience, and the copious photographs form an engaging, complementary chronicle in their own right.

The book builds on research carried out by the author since 1979, including fieldwork periods in Solomon Islands totaling about a year, and is the first general book-length ethnography of the Kwara'ae, who are one of the major linguistic groups of Solomon Islands. Constituting a rich historical account of more than a hundred years of colonial and postcolonial transformations of Kwara'ae culture and society, Burt's book is in some ways a parallel to the late Roger Keesing's recent *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy* (1992). The Kwara'ae of Kwai district described by Burt remain “a people fiercely attached to the tradition of their ancestors,” but unlike their neighboring Kwaio “pagans” they are now predominantly Christians who have “adopted with [equally fierce] conviction a new religion which contradicts some of the fundamental values of this tradition” (1).

Not unexpectedly, then, Ben Burt's major aim is “to document and explain how and why [the Kwara'ae of Kwai] have transformed their society by changing their religion” (1). This initial question is not an easy one to answer, but it does set the tone whereby the author persistently and lucidly brings to the forefront the agency and active, innovative role of generations of Kwara'ae through processes of confrontation, resistance, compromise, and reorganization, leading to their creation of a “new social order through which [the Kwara'ae]

now participate in the wider systems of Solomon Islands and the world" (1). It is axiomatic for Burt that today's Kwara'ae still have a very distinctive local religion—but one that synthesizes Christianity and traditional religious ideas and thereby enables the Kwara'ae to cope with rapidly changing worlds.

Whereas Keesing's account of Kwaio resistance is presented in large measure through Kwaio narratives, interwoven with the explicit presence of the anthropologist as protagonist as well as chronicler, Burt's story of the mutual entanglements of Kwara'ae tradition and Christianity is given more uniformly in the author's voice—in a definitive, authoritative, some would say more conventional, ethnographic fashion. Nevertheless Burt succeeds well in highlighting the individual agency and often contradictory "projects" of a multitude of named Kwara'ae actors, past and present, thereby echoing his concern to explain history in terms of Kwara'ae cultural premises.

Building on a multitude of sources (including an in-depth selection of documents from mission and colonial archives), and with brief but well-chosen comparisons (for example with similar processes in the neighboring island of Isabel, analyzed in Geoffrey White's recent book *Identity Through History* [1991], and with the policies of other missions active in Malaita and elsewhere in Solomon Islands), Burt convincingly chronicles complex chains of events unfolding through more than a century. Starting in the days of early colonial encounters, this journey takes readers with the

Kwara'ae through times of the Fiji and Queensland labor trade, "pacification" and political collapse of autonomous feuding communities under the forces of colonial government, the emergence and burgeoning of Christian missions, and sociopolitical experiments under Maasina Rule. They move toward recent decades' increasingly complex brew of economic development and stagnation, traditionalist revivals, urban drift, and consolidated "traditionalized" Christianity, since 1978 all in the context of an independent nation-state. Incipient and contested fundamentalist Christianity carried forth partly by Kwara'ae returnees from Queensland plantation labor fueled the processes whereby the South Sea Evangelical Mission, established in Malaita in the early 1900s, grew into a central force in the social and cultural transformations leading to the present-day Kwara'ae situation as "Christian peasants increasingly involved in the global capitalist economy and its ubiquitous Western culture" (225). In 1964 the independent South Sea Evangelical Church was constituted as a Malaitan-led successor of the mission, and its indigenized Christianity has continued to develop as a dominant organizational structure for community involvement in today's wide world.

Viewing the book as a whole, it is notable that the initial ethnographic background chapters avoid a static view of a "traditional baseline" of beliefs and ancestral lifeworlds. Rather, the mutual interactions of past and present are clearly accounted for from the very beginning of the book. Burt attempts to synthesize anthropo-

logical and contemporary indigenous perspectives on basic dimensions of Kwara'ae "tradition"—religion (including detailed discussions of *tabu*), exchange and political organization, "wealth and violence," and morality. Characteristically, Kwara'ae Christians tend to represent their traditional "laws" as "Ten Commandments," which they compare to those of the Bible, "but the morality is also distinctively Malaitan and characteristic of a tribal society of politically autonomous local groups" (35).

This and many other cases of Kwara'ae—western "mirror images" and Kwara'ae appropriation of western concepts are clues to processes that might well have been further examined in the light of Gramscian views on hegemony and counterhegemony, as exemplified by Keesing and other recent writers on the "politics of tradition." Also, the concept of "tradition" is employed in this book with less reservation than is usual among these recent writers—Burt uses "tradition" mainly as a translation of the Kwara'ae concept *falafala*, which is also glossed as "culture" or "way of life"; essentialization may loom on the horizon (which, it has to be admitted, is not unexpected, given the inherently essentialist nature of indigenous Melanesian codifications of *kastom*).

Despite this sometimes rather shallow conceptual clarification, the book succeeds splendidly in conveying the many tensions inherent in Kwara'ae Christianity and "Christian tradition," whereby "tradition, although no longer a political threat to Christianity, continues to be a focus of contradictions in Kwara'ae society" (249). Con-

solidating the criteria of Christian fundamentalist doctrines (which entail a demonization of traditional religion) with the need to pay attention to "tradition" is no small matter for present-day Kwara'ae, who advocate an indigenous Christianity as their main framework for dealing with each other and with worlds outside Malaita.

This book is a valuable addition to the growing collection of studies in Melanesian anthropology that look far beyond static exoticism to invite wide regional, even global, comparison of processes of colonial subjugation, indigenous agency and resistance, cultural transformation, and creative dialectics between past and present. By giving sensitive emphasis to the complexities of Melanesian Christianity in its wider context, Ben Burt's book demonstrates how the innovative and creative ways of contemporary Melanesian traditionalists, Christians, and traditionalist Christians alike may indeed serve as a valuable lesson for the world, and why Melanesian Christianity in itself represents a major analytical challenge to regional anthropology.

EDVARD HVIDING
University of Bergen

* * *